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ABSTRACT

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) studied the various requests it received from the social partners (employers, unions, governments, educational institutions) and how they could be more closely involved in CEDEFOP's activities. To analyze the requests, 70 interviews were organized around a four-part questionnaire: CEDEFOP's output; subjects and types of activities concerned with vocational training in the various organizations of the social partners; requests made to CEDEFOP concerning subjects for study and type of action; and relations between the management board and the social partners' organizations. Findings indicated CEDEFOP's enormous potential in connection with the social partners. CEDEFOP's capacity lay in the approach to partners' differences and similarities. Suggested lines of action were as follows: establishment of a steering committee on qualification and certification composed of employers, European and national trade union representatives, and scientists with the analysis relating as much to the processes and mechanisms as the effects; organization of exchanges and discussions to clarify matters of topical interest; study visits as a means of access to specific and practical information; syntheses of research in each European Union member country while at the same time involving the social partners in the working hypotheses; creation of networks around subjects dealt with in the work program; and strengthening of the management board. (YLB)

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CEDEFOP and the social partners

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Information and discussion document

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panorama

CEDEFOP and the social partners

Anne-Françoise Theunissen

December 1996

Thessaloniki 1997

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Preface

After her departure from the Management Board of which she had been both Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Anne-Françoise Theunissen became involved in the European Social Dialogue, she was thus well placed to conduct this study and CEDEFOP is most grateful to her.

Our gratitude also goes to Louis Mallet, who has given CEDEFOP his constant support and devoted many hours to the discussions underlying the substance and structure of this report.

We also wish to thank Ulrich Wiegand for his method and his willingness to help and advise at all times.

We would also express our appreciation of the work done by Eleni Spachis and Marguarita Pinto of DG XXII, members of the steering group.

Finally we should like to thank all those people consulted for their thoroughness and patience in preparing their replies to Mme Theunissen's questions.

Upon conclusion of the discussions on recommendations contained in this report, the Management Board asked the Director to publish the results in the form of an information and discussion document. The responsibilities of the social partners in the field of vocational training should be broadened. It is CEDEFOP's hope that this document will make the situation clear and that it will prove a source of inspiration that will strengthen the support and commitment of the social partners in achieving the medium-term priorities for 1997-2000.

Thessaloniki
31 January 1997

Johan van Rens
Director

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1. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

1.1. Purpose

At the request of a number of those participating in the European Social Dialogue the CEDEFOP Management Board included in its 1996 Work Programme a study of the various requests made by the social partners and how they could be more closely involved in CEDEFOP's activities.

The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of their requirements given their various types of representation and negotiation. It seeks to state the social partners' expectations in the matter of vocational training while defining the areas in which CEDEFOP takes action and how it does so as to show the various ways it performs the tasks with which it has been entrusted.

This study suggests certain procedures and working methods based on the specific characteristics of the social partners aimed at creating conditions facilitating discussion and decision on the Centre's lines of activity and following up its work.

Because they are involved in different forms of concertation and negotiation in the various countries the social partners are also a source of information and influence decision-making. The fact that the manner of their representation differs from one national system to another leads them to formulate different requests in such matters as:

- Technical assistance
- Service
- Political and/or intellectual clarification.

Managing complexity

The social partners formulate their requests against a complex background of activity, with the result that different and even contradictory objectives emerge when addressing one and the same problem. Thus requests concerned with qualifications will be differently focused

depending on whether they come from the head of a personnel department or an official of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) or of a European employers' association such as UNICE or CEEP. It is against this background of complexity that the Management Board is called upon to discuss the directions of its activity for the next few years in order to define and choose the subjects to be tackled and which of the centre's functions should be given priority. Indeed, CEDEFOP's various partners will be asked to say whether the Centre should specialise or respond to requests on specific subjects, whether it should strengthen its capacity for exchanges and its role as a platform or seek to become **the** European documentation centre.

1.2. Method

In order clearly to identify requests we made use of the Action Guidelines[1] and the audit reports of Louis Mallet and the Quaternaire group based on discussions started in 1992, and took account of the process of internal renewal. We also organised meetings with a certain number of social partners chosen for their level of intervention and the different national systems.

a. Action Guidelines 1993-1997 and audit reports: a technical means of support; internal renewal

Action Guidelines 1993-1997

The importance of this document, which ranks among the institutional changes that have taken place in the present decade, lies as much in its new understanding of the Centre's tasks as in its definition of priorities centred on knowledge of the systems and on qualifications.

While adopting a number of innovative approaches such as territoriality, the links and absence of links between education and continuing training, and an analysis of the failure to exploit individual qualifications, the Action Guidelines gloss over a number of the challenges posed this century, such as the disappearance of the iron curtain, whereas laying greater stress on the

[1] Action Guidelines 1993-1997 adopted by the Management Board on 18 September 1992

major geopolitical changes would have involved CEDEFOP in a more dynamic work process. Indeed, one of the Centre's fundamental tasks is to analyse training systems in the process of change, including those linked to developments in the labour markets. Such an omission may mean delay in the acquisition of information concerning qualification systems.

Audit reports

The Louis Mallet report both analyses the way in which the Centre operates and defines the various services it provides. It raises several questions concerning the task of facilitating exchanges and providing a forum while stressing that these only have any sense if the various partners, and especially the social partners, forge links between their own organisations and CEDEFOP.

In the Quaternaire Report the Commission is CEDEFOP's client. Consequently the Commission is the body chiefly entitled to provide assessment indicators and to determine the Centre's positioning. Contrary to what is stated in the Action Guidelines and the Louis Mallet report approved by the Management Board, the Quaternaire report displays serious conceptual weaknesses regarding the Centre's various tasks, as the Management Board's reaction showed.

Internal renewal

Following CEDEFOP's transfer from Berlin to Thessaloniki the Management Board stepped up its efforts directed to innovation and the Centre's internal renewal. In March 1996, Edith Cresson a member of the Commission, chaired a seminar organised by the Management Board during which a discussion of fundamentals took place. Mme Cresson also based herself on CEDEFOP information in order to evolve approaches which led to the definition of CEDEFOP's Action Guidelines and of certain of its priorities.

The Management Board adopted the medium-term priorities at its meeting in November 1996.

b. Discussion with the social partners

In order to analyse the social partners' requests we organised 70 interviews[2] based on a four-part questionnaire, viz.:

- the Centre's output;
- subjects and types of activity (priorities) concerned with vocational training in the various organisations of the social partners;
- requests made to CEDEFOP concerning subjects for study and type of action;
- relations between the Management Board and the social partners' organisations.

On the basis of these interviews we were able to formulate nine proposals for action over the next few years which express in specific terms a selection of the most sensitive subjects touched on during discussions, even if certain interviews revealed contradictory approaches as regards problem areas and working methods, as in the case of the importance attributed to research. These proposals for action should be discussed.

The questions came from five different levels:

- International organisations;
- European social partner organisations (advisory bodies);
- National social partner organisations;
- Regional social partner organisations;
- Members of the Management Board.

[2] See annex

2. THE CREATION OF CEDEFOP

Influence of the social partners

CEDEFOP was created at the wish of the social partners who, working within the Economic and Social Committee in the early seventies, drafted a plan for the creation of two bodies to be tasked with studying matters of health and safety and of vocational training. In 1975 the Council of Ministers, acting on a proposal by the Commission, issued a directive based on this draft creating the Dublin Foundation and CEDEFOP. For these initiators, many of whom held senior posts in their own organisation, CEDEFOP was to play an important role as a think tank in areas in which at that time little work had been done.

The years spent clearing the ground, creating working and research structures by intuition which even now reflect the correctness of their approach to major questions, influenced the decisions taken by the Commission in the matter of action programmes. The priorities defined by the Commission ten years later and the desire of Jacques Delors when President of the Commission, to breathe life into the social dialogue encouraged the allocation of substantial budgets. Studies were then carried out by the Commission using networks that CEDEFOP had discovered and expanded. Often these studies related to subjects previously dealt with by the Centre.

To cope with the increased presence of the social partners, the locations for consultation were increased, chiefly within the framework of Community programmes. However, this development, which could have gone hand in hand with an exploitation and enhancing the value of the Centre's original experience, instead gave rise to a sense of rivalry. This situation, much regretted by some who had been involved in the creation of CEDEFOP, is often laid at the door of the Commission, with some accusing it of wishing to transform the Centre into a mere means of technical assistance.

All those questioned expressed their attachment to CEDEFOP, which they considered indispensable as a unique meeting place free and detached from political decision-making, even

if they wished that CEDEFOP's products and the manner in which they were produced were more useful to them in their work. While CEDEFOP was not called upon to adopt a position in political matters it was responsible for explaining matters to the various parties involved. The challenge consisted in giving sense and shape to the Centre which all concerned considered capable to gathering relevant information and converting it into usable syntheses.

If one feels that questioning existing structures and practices encourages renewal and acquiring new perspectives, one can say that CEDEFOP was given the chance of a lifetime when its was transferred to Thessaloniki. Its geographical location can be taken as an opportunity to embark on a course of specialisation in the subjects it tackles and in its tasks, the beginning of which, incidentally, is visible in the restructuring of the Vocational Training journal and the creation of an editorial committee, the process of internal renewal (medium-term prioirities) and the strengthening of the forces of synergy through its programme of study visits.

3. CEDEFOP'S PRODUCTS

A third of the persons questioned said that they knew very little if anything about the Centre's work. These were usually people from the countries of southern Europe and never from Germany, Austria or Denmark. All those questioned had a direct responsibility as head of a department responsible for vocational training matters or indirect responsibility within a confederation. However, with the single exception of one person in Catalonia, all were aware of CEDEFOP's existence and thought the kind of subjects it dealt with, and the presence of the social partners, to be important.

The knowledge of CEDEFOP products of those who answered in the positive would seem to derive from their involvement in the Centre's work and/or from their use of the products themselves. However, it is interesting to look more closely at the concept of "using" a product. In fact people used the same word to mean different things. Some when asked said that they did not use the Centre's work but then added that they read certain documents in order to find information useful for their activities. Thus the representatives of the metal industry employers

in Belgium said that they found information relating to the redefinition of certain qualifications and training profiles in the Centre's work on the comparability of qualifications without, however, considering that they had made use of them. Others, on the other hand, used the term "use" to mean reading the Vocational Training journal (to provide food for thought on questions connected with the performance of their job) as also of the glossaries (to learn technical terms). Faced with these different ideas as to what constitutes use, we need to be careful in interpreting replies concerning use of the Centre's work.

3.1. Products most often mentioned

- 80% of those questioned cited study visits and work on the comparability of qualifications. This is not surprising if one bears in mind that each of these activities represents a third of the Centre's operational resources and has assembled substantial networks of people to deal with the subjects involved;
- People occupying responsible posts in certain sectors of industry in the case of the comparability of qualifications programme or people involved in training activities in the case of study visits;
- 50% referred to training system monographs;
- Almost 40% found reading Vocational Training interesting;
- A minority cited other studies, such a sectoral reports, the directory of occupational profiles and older work on women, or even the Thesaurus.

With the exception of the Germans and Austrians those questioned were keen to give an opinion on certain specific products and working methods without it being, however, possible to conclude that those were the only products they knew.

3.2. Opinions

Opinions on the comparability of qualifications programme varied. Criticisms included the following:

- Cumbersome procedures;
- A single model;
- Incompatibility with the national system;
- Lack of updating;
- Unsuitability of the method.

While the Germans laid more stress on the absence of updating, the Danes on incompatibility with the national system, the Italians on the existence of a single model, the French on the cumbersome procedures and the "Europeans" on the method, all of them regarded the networks structured about the work as extremely important and as a sound basis for building up a common basis of data on the different qualification systems.

Comment on the Centre's work as a whole tend to converge as regards both criticism and expectations:

- *Closeness to reality*: This point was common to all those questioned but especially marked among the sectors of industry organised at European level;
- *Up-to-dateness*: Some studies are not published until two or three months after completion because of the time taken for translation and publication;
- *Updating*: When a product contains information of a permanent nature including statistical data, for example, it rapidly becomes obsolete if not updated;
- *Comparative analyses*: All those questioned who used the monographs stated that it would be interesting to include elements of comparative analysis such as points at which the systems converged or diverged;
- *Use of the Centre's work*: CEDEFOP is expected to exploit all its resources
  - by designing a study project
  - by putting it in a temporal context and reporting on the state of research

- by relating it to other studies by the Centre in the same field, such as comparability of qualifications, occupational profiles and the qualification portfolio;
- by throwing them open to discussion.

3.3. Analysis

a. CEDEFOP's identity

It is the Centre's task to submit for discussion information prepared in cooperation with research centres or intermediate research bodies such as CEREQ (centre for studies and research on qualifications) in France or the BIBB (Federal Institute for Vocational Training) in Germany. Half those questioned were not aware of the services CEDEFOP is able to provide. This makes for an identity problem. The services are seen as a number of separate activities with no hierarchical structure and unrelated to one another. Even when people are familiar with one or other of CEDEFOP's products they still tend to ask the question "But what exactly does CEDEFOP do?" European and Danish employers consider that it is the quality of the products that determines how well an agency is known, Italian employers stress the fact that the Centre's products are not actively disseminated, while the social partners sitting on joint national bodies find it difficult to access the information. CEDEFOP does not appear to specialise either in its fields of activity or its working methods, despite the presence of social partners on the Management Board. Identity in relation to subject field and identity in terms of tasks: the problem is twofold.

This problem typically reflects in the variety of definitions proposed by the partners. After an initial negative definition "It is not a research centre, nor a programme management organisation, nor a place of political decision-making" CEDEFOP's role is then described by the social partners in very varied terms. While the identity problem has its negative side it also has a positive one, in that it reflects flexibility in operation.

b. Produce something useful

Do such comments represent a provocation, express a need or have an ideological basis? Clarifying this point constitutes a challenge not only to CEDEFOP but also to the social partners. Opinions differ as to whether the emphasis should be on technical or what is considered theoretical work. The differences between employers and trade union representatives vary according to subject:

- Employers want more practical studies and projects;
- German employers consider studies on work organisation useless;
- Employers and trade unionists responsible for sectoral negotiations want to see more work done on qualifications and training programmes;
- Representatives of horizontal (area) unions want to see work enabling them to grasp the economic and social changes that are occurring, including studies on changes in work organisation.

Employers tend to have more reservations regarding theoretical studies "The work is interesting in theory but not for practical purposes". Technical studies are critically scrutinised and the majority of those concerned felt CEDEFOP had encountered difficulties with the comparability of qualifications programme, even if in certain cases it had been possible to define the content of certain qualifications, as in the case of the chemical industry in Portugal. Furthermore, technical work where progress is necessarily slow because it covers all the countries of the European Union risks becoming rapidly obsolete.

c. Networks

Those questioned accepted CEDEFOP's ability to bring individuals together, create a relationship between them and act as the forum for continuing discussions and create networks. However they hope that it will develop this capacity further by structuring networks. It is important both to bring together people who are similar, those who are different, and those from various institutions with the objective of working productively together and to inspire them with dynamism.

4 SOCIAL DIALOGUE AT NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

In order to meet the social partners' requests to CEDEFOP one has to understand their point of view on the issues and priorities involved in their work. All those questioned set vocational training against the background of the radical changes currently taking place. When competitiveness becomes a major objective training is viewed as vitally necessary. When the emphasis is on the social consequences of the changes affecting the labour markets, vocational training is seen as a longer-term guarantee for the individual. Between these two diametrically opposite approaches one finds different nuances in expression according to what are the priorities perceived, and these vary with the negotiating level of the social partners.

4.1. National level

The priorities of the social partners relate to subjects and not to working methods. If we adopt a quantitative approach the subjects mentioned break down as follows in order of importance:

- Universities and schools
  - Openness to the commercial world
  - Exploiting vocational education
  - Alternating theory with practical experience
  - The learning and training processes
  - Linking general education to vocational training
  - Training of adults
  - Breaking the link with school (2 people);
- Certification and recognition of skills acquired on the job (employers and trade unionists);
- Qualifications, including maintenance and exploitation of craft skills;
- Reform and/or creation of structures (training centres, bodies with joint representation, observatories);
- Paying for training (German and Austrian trade unionists are anxious to reform the financing of training while employers from these countries wish to optimise costs);

- Sectors;
- Work organisation and technological change;
- Crossborder zones;
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- Individual leave (France);
- Migration (Greece).

4.2. Community level

Answering the same questions the social partners at European level put more stress on global issues and working methods. Their priorities in order of importance were:

- The concept of the national, local and regional labour market (all);
- An analysis of training systems (all);
- The labour markets and the commitment of young people (employers);
- Low qualifications (trade unionists and employers in some sectors);
- Combating illiteracy (trade unionists in some sectors);
- Competitiveness and flexibility (employers);
- Contacts with research (all);
- Analysis of services provided by socio-industrial organisations.

4.3. Analysis

All the social partners questioned were worried about the consequences of the changes taking place in the labour markets. Employers stressed the increasing number of young people without jobs and the majority felt that the best remedy would be to create a link between school and firms. Trade unionists, on the other hand, laid more stress on the measures that must go hand in hand with company restructuring. The main points yielded by the analysis were:

a. Links with negotiation

A number of countries are engaged in important negotiations. Thus at the time the interviews were conducted the social partners in Italy were in the throes of a reform of the vocational training system (number of years of compulsory schooling, apprenticeship and continuing training). Here the two sides were largely in agreement, reflecting several months of negotiation. In the course of these interviews all the social partners were concerned to explain the factors underlying their discussions and negotiations.

b. Rethinking

Rethinking relates mainly to the educational system. Most employers were very critical of the school system and considered that a dialogue should take place between those responsible for the educational system, basic training and the employers' needs. "The firm brings the socio-economic world into school. Bringing the economic component into general education should not be done in a spirit of conquest".

A number of important questions were also raised concerning the funding of continuing training. Employers felt that they made the greatest contribution here whereas others felt that the budget was unfairly weighted to benefit the better organised sectors. All, however, wished to see the way in which training finance was spread between the state, employers and individuals revised and it became clear that the next few years will see considerable discussion on the distribution of costs.

c. Starting new activities

Certification was one of the questions most often raised and an area where the various social partners tended to be involved in specific projects, such as the Belgian metalworkers who were engaged in a Community programme with their counterparts in the Nord/Pas de Calais region of France, social partners involved in the European social dialogue or the Portuguese who are starting discussions on creating a training system involving both sides of industry. Regardless of whether it is a matter for negotiation, this question, which was raised in most countries and Community organisations, is not yet covered by a proper European work programme.

d. Problems to be tackled

None of those interviewed claimed that vocational training led to employment. From this we can conclude that confronting the reality of the labour markets helps people to realise that training certainly improves the chances of job-seekers both male and female but does not necessarily mean immediate success. However, the employers' request concerning the educational system may seem to contradict these points because they wish school to be brought nearer to firms by better meeting their needs in terms of qualifications and skills in the interests of competitiveness.

Corporate restructuring that marginalises older and less skilled workers were quoted by the trade unionists as a major problem which little was being done to solve. "Amounts spent to limit the damage caused by mad cow disease disproportionate compared with what action is proposed to avoid marginalisation due to unemployment and the loss of wages."

e. Ideas and perspectives

A large number of proposals have been made for the next few years, such as giving general training and multi-skilling priority over specialisation in order to ensure that young people can adjust to the changes taking place in the labour market, granting training leave, devising training courses to encourage career advancement etc.

f. Links with Community decisions and programmes

The social partners involved in the European social dialogue stress the risk of deadlock. Unless it produces specific results (agreements or recommendations addressed to the Commission and the member states) the social dialogue will turn out simply to have been a "paper dialogue". However, the three European organisations (UNICE, CEEP and CES) have set up their own internal groups charged with following up and preparing their positions for the various European meetings concerned with training. This initiative will make it possible not only to state their positions in a manner that better reflects the link between the positions adopted by the various partners in their own country and those emerging at European level, but also to

enter into discussions in greater depth between employers and trade unions, sectoral organisations and multi-industry organisations. All the European social partners wish to establish systems for monitoring the changes taking place at the workplace and in job content.

The influence of the European Social Fund on training systems, through the regulations governing the grant of funds, is especially noticeable in the countries of southern Europe. Moreover, the European subsidy mechanism puts a burden on the management of small regional organisations representing both sides of industry. These problems were not referred to by the Germans and Austrians.

All those questioned are involved in Community programmes. This opens up enormous scope for exchanges leading to specific action, particularly the exchange of young workers or exchange of experience in areas not well covered at European level, such as certification, sandwich-type training and firms' training programmes. All those interviewed referred to the comparative invisibility of action being taken by them and would like to see production of a synthesis and analysis of the different matters being tackled.

5. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF CEDEFOP?

The great expansion of the training market has led the social partners to question its purpose. Their replies varied according to whether they were a trade unionist or employer. Without wishing to typify their position too definitely one can conclude from their remarks that employers are worried about the increased competition between firms and that the trade unionists wish to see decisions and programmes centring on the individual.

For employers a firm's survival is dependent upon the amount invested in machinery and labour. It is therefore necessary to remedy the various shortcomings, whether the lack of middle managers who have risen from worker level or the adaptation to technological changes and restructuring by quality training systems.

For the trade unionists the growing precarity of employment makes it necessary to warn individuals, and training then takes on a different meaning. The technical aspect has to go hand in hand with a more general content enabling a person to adjust to a reality that is becoming increasingly complex.

In other words employers would like to see a distinction made between technical aspects of training and the accumulation of knowledge, between apprenticeship and general education, while the trade unionists would like to introduce general education into the specific apprenticeship process. These different views deserve discussion in that they radically alter the choice to be made at the level of both initial and continuing training.

5.1. Most frequent requests

a. Areas of activity

Approaching the corporate world or that of trade union organisations as entirely similar bodies would reduce CEDEFOP's ability to do its work. To realise their diversity, on the other hand, enhances CEDEFOP's competence and strengthens recognition of its specific nature. This

diversity is expressed in the requests made, which show both the similarities and the differences in a single area. Requests related to the following fields in order of importance:

- Knowledge of training systems (this was referred to by all trade unionists and employers), with the accent on comparison and analysis of systems and needs, the skills report and NVQs;
- Qualification and certification (again mentioned by most employers and trade unionists) with the emphasis on a consistent system at European level, comparability, the creation of an additional European year, recruitment in firms, key qualifications, crafts and technological changes;
- Reform of school and university education (employers);
- Organisation of the labour markets and work organisation (half the trade unionists and employers but not the German employers);
- Funding (European social partners and employers);
- Extending and deepening the European Social Dialogue and linking it to the work of the social partners in each country (half the trade unionists and employers);
- Analysis of participation of the various parties, anticipation, preparation of priorities to be defined on the basis of experience gained in the framework of European programmes, training trainers and discussions of major problems (points raised by a minority).

b. Types of action

All those interviewed mentioned CEDEFOP's types of involvement and preferred one or other depending on whether they gave priority to research or exchanges:

- Study visits (all);
- Forum for exchange (all but in different ways and with different proposals);
- Research and studies (differing opinions);
- Structuring documentation on CEDEFOP's activities;
- Dissemination (seen as a problem by the countries of Southern Europe and sectors of industry;
- Translation of Community programmes: this request deserves to be taken up even though

made by only three people. In fact it illustrates the lack of knowledge of the work being done for CEDEFOP by certain social partners in firms. Indeed for these people CEDEFOP can be both a source of encouragement and a means of following up European programmes and technical studies on qualifications.

5.2. Opinions

a. Fields of activity

Knowledge of training systems

In a Europe not defined as such at the social level information remains a prime commodity. In the thirty years that have seen the switch from a principle of convergence in order to establish a common policy on matters of training to the principle of subsidiarity the social partners have realised that despite the retention of their specific national systems interdependence is a prior condition for their work. All of them expressed the need to learn about other systems. Made as they are from different levels, the requests relate to different points:

- An analysis of systems in their historical and cultural context;
- An analysis of systems in crossborder zones;
- International comparisons;
- Comparison and analysis of differences in investment in training and its consequences for productivity and growth.

But the most significant request, best reflecting the changes noticeable in the approaches of the social partners, is their insistence that CEDEFOP analyse the process and the mechanisms rather than the situation and effects at a given time.

Qualifications and certification

Perceived as the most controversial question together with that of comparability of qualifications, its importance in the social constructs was referred to by all the social partners who also mention the difficulties encountered in defining its limits. For some it is a muddle with no hope of a solution. However, once again one encounters the two contradictory or

complementary views of the analysis of qualification and analysis of competences, the former being viewed as the result of mediation between employers and workers while the latter is worked out in dealings between the individual and his employer without any form of mediation. A number of requests relate to this subject:

- What gives access to qualifications?
- What are cross-skills?
- What are the new qualifications?
- What progress has been made with occupational and training profiles?
- How are occupational profiles defined in the specific discussion of industrial sectors (sectoral funds)?
- What elements make up and determine employability?
- Analyse the difference in terms of personal development between multiskilling and multifunction;
- Analyse as a matter of priority the process of social structuring in the crossborder zones. This complex question is necessarily disputed and always accompanied by a request - as a matter of urgency - to develop a process of certification for validating skills acquired on the job and experience. Whether it is a matter of granting a formal qualification on the basis of work experience, recognising this experience or ensuring acceptance of its validity at a more formal level, this request has not yet been relayed to all European bodies, even if it is mentioned as the intention in a number of white papers. Not only are the social partners resolute in this matter but they can also speed up the development of a system despite their differences. Some of them ask that certification should not necessarily be linked to recognition by the public authorities while others wish their efforts to result in a political decision.

Young people

All the social partners express great worry on behalf of young people whom they put at the centre of the problems to be tackled. Most of them feel that the solution is essentially to be found in a closer link between school and work. Various approaches are proposed.

- A strengthening of the relationship between firms and school by means of a partnership whereby firms give the school their knowledge without becoming involved in teaching *"Not in a spirit of conquest. The world of business has to bring commercial knowhow to the schools"*[3];
- Reforming apprenticeship systems, including university training, by introducing periods of practical work experience as an essential element of the course where this does not already exist;
- Developing sandwich-type training;
- The question of breaking away from school.

Labour markets and negotiations

Vocational training is currently a subject of (possible) negotiation between employers and the trade unions. Both sides would like to see an analysis of the results of agreements reached by sectors organised at European level. Some would like the fourth mandate of the Education and Training working party of the European social dialogue to provide for a follow-up of its field studies and that the group annex negotiated agreements to its opinions. The request made to CEDEFOP is the result of different interests because it concerns both the accompanying of experts in the social dialogue and an analysis of the results obtained to date.

Thought must also be given to the progress made in certain sectors, such as the memorandum on low qualifications concluded by the European cleaning industry or projects set in hand to train managers of small and medium-sized enterprises. These specific achievements, though limited in their scope, shed light on the problems involved in a series of issues negotiated between the social partners.

At the same time, a greater representation of women in negotiations could make for faster progress.[4]

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[3] In the interview the world of business refers to all the social partners

[4] It is a matter of urgency that women's experience should be considered a subject for analysis and not as an object on which decisions are taken.

Anticipation

Should CEDEFOP concern itself with futurology? This is a matter of considerable dispute since some people feel that attempting to predict the future is a waste of resources while others make a distinction between anticipating and forecasting. But the request for an analysis seeking to gain a better idea of future trends and their consequences is unanimous. It is important to make syntheses to clarify the problems and the dead ends down which one wanders. To do this recourse is frequently made to ILO studies.

b. Types of action

All those asked wanted CEDEFOP to be a body rendering complex realities accessible. It was thus not a question of involving itself in scientific research but of making such research accessible in connection with problems raised and questions tackled. To accept this challenge priority is given to:

- Using research;
- Structuring studies;
- Provinding a forum for exchanges;
- A working link betweem CEDEFOP and the various organisational levels of the social partners.

Research (designing, synthesising, disseminating)

Faced with choices and with negotiations in their daily life the social partners possess knowledge which is hardly ever exploited. Despite this fact they are more often perceived as subjects for analysis rather than as producers of instruments for analysis. Without being transformed into researchers they could be involved in the preparation of studies carried out by CEDEFOP and assist in formulating analytical postulates and working hypotheses, as also in defining types of use.

CEDEFOP with its fund of knowledge and experience should be aware of the state of research in each member country. It is important to render research carried out on subjects of interest

to the social partners accessible but also to use it as the basis for proposals. CEDEFOP is being asked to act as an interface between practice and research.

The first step is still to disseminate its products. But one is aware that the results are only used during discussions within each organisation and country. All those questioned make proposals on these lines:

- When preparing postulates and hypotheses for study the specialists responsible should take the time to meet the employers' and trade union organisations as well as representatives of research centres and of public bodies. When one is confronted with problems as complex as qualifications and certification the time available for preliminary investigation must not be limited. It is important to grasp the different and very varied types of practice and to prepare to structure information with the help of the socio-economic bodies working in this field;
- When preparing a study, a discussion with the social partners should be organised on the synthesis of the various research projects on the subject. A regular synthesis on a given subject could also be published in CEDEFOP Info;
- Some studies should be concluded on the basis of discussions within each of the member countries.

Exchanges and forum

The great majority of those questioned agreed that CEDEFOP's specific purpose was to provide a forum for exchanges organised away from the environment of urgent political decision-making. They wished CEDEFOP to perform its task as a disseminator of information particularly by organising exchanges and debates on practices that develop and the issues relating to the end of this century. A large number of proposals concern the different aspects of the exchange function:

- A meeting of wise men - senior people whose long experience enables them to master the information;
- The Thessaloniki Centre that regularly organises seminars for senior people;
- A place for discussion on the work of the social dialogue;
- A means of liaison between CEDEFOP and people at regional and national level;

- A place where one can grasp the complexity of the different realities, including sectoral realities. The experiment conducted with the social partners in the retail trade in partnership with the Commission merits being developed further.

Study visits

Some study visits could be organised with the social partners, not just on specific subjects but on working methods encouraging a follow-up to study visits.

Training

The build-up of collective knowledge involves the social partners in long processes similar to the process of training.

Management Board

The great majority of people questioned expressed their interest in CEDEFOP while pointing to the risk inherent in a growing gap between the various realities they encountered and the decisions taken concerning CEDEFOP's products. To close this gap would call for a change in operating methods within each member state and the use of different methods of working with the Management Board. It would be necessary to:

- Give the Management Board the means enabling it to perform its decision-making function as regards guidelines and work programme by means of prepared discussions;
- Set up a think tank responsible for providing the key elements for medium-term activity and evaluation of work;
- Plan a regular seminar organised by the Management Board members in the country assuming Presidency of the Council of Ministers and relating to the work of CEDEFOP or other important subjects.

5.3. Analysis

a. Requests made

There is clearly no systematic and close correlation between the requests made to CEDEFOP and the priorities set by the social partners in their own countries. This is particularly

noticeable in the matter of qualification. Here the geographical distance could mean that in the various countries the social partners concerned themselves with urgent questions and that their requests to CEDEFOP are designed more to measure the effects of their actions.

This does not, however, apply for the social partners at European level whose priorities and requests for anticipating and monitoring are closely linked. This is because their work involves them in general and macroeconomic matters. The relationship between the area of action and the request is also close in the case of the social partners in the various sectors whose prioirites for action translate into requests for technical assistance from CEDEFOP.

b. Diversity and difference

All the requests are embedded in different social cultures and constructs. When the training system has a long history, requests tend to be pragmatic rather than linked to global concerns. This is the case of Germany. In Italy, on the other hand, at a time when negotiations are taking place on the system as a whole, requests relate to matters connected with methods of analysis and exchange.

In the case of some requests, such as those of a technical nature, there is a greater similarity in the practices of trade unionists and employers at sector level than between the different trade union levels or employers within each group.

c. Implications for CEDEFOP

If CEDEFOP wishes to respond to every request it will have to involve itself in diversity and diversification - so many subjects, so many questions ranging from lending support to national action, such as young people's exchanges, to the system for monitoring qualifications. This variety of different requests ties in with the question of identity. It is thus essential to determine CEDEFOP's specific role and ensure that this correlates with the means it has at its disposal. This specific nature of the responses called for would require a different mobilisation of CEDEFOP's internal resources.

d. Priorities

In view of the diversity of requests one might decide on a number of working methods to be given priority over the next few years. These relate essentially to the means for intervention and concern:

- Structuring a place for discussion and training (forum);
- Deciding on its target groups and users;
- Structuring working hypotheses with the social partners (qualification, funding and orientation);
- Linking the social dialogue and the practices of the social partners in the different countries;
- Monitoring the field and taking into account the state of research.

e. Relations with the various partners

The countries in which the social partners have not formally linked their practices and the requests addressed to CEDEFOP will formulate specific proposals on the relationship they consider indispensable. The requests will take different forms, such as the creation of monitoring outposts on the various subjects being studied, and fact-finding missions. Different places in very different forms exist in most countries and may be used as a base.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This somewhat rapid discussion of requests shows CEDEFOP's enormous potential in connection with the social partners. CEDEFOP's capacity lies in the approach to their differences and their similarities. It is this multiform approach avoiding the risk of rapid compartmentalisation that will enrich CEDEFOP's work.

6.1. Several countries are involved in restructuring all or part of their training system. This involves reconsidering either the duration and age of compulsory schooling or the system of continuing training, or again the participation of the social partners in initial vocational training. The negotiations with the social partners in Italy are exemplary in this regard. They raise a number of questions which call for a better knowledge of the different models and their results.

6.2. The changes taking place in the labour markets influence work organisation and the definition of qualifications. Increasing unemployment, the shedding of a great many jobs in industry, changes in production organisation and the development of service activities enhance the responsibility of the social partners. If employers put more stress on the constraints imposed by competitiveness and the trade unions on the negative effects of social deregulation both will seek in CEDEFOP the conditions enabling them to anticipate these changes. The future order of Europe will certainly demand more investment in training.

6.3. The Community's social dialogue is evolving across industry boundaries and within individual sectors. Vocational training therefore opens up an area accessible to negotiation and to agreements between the social partners, even if they encounter genuine difficulties in putting them into effect and following up certain work, such as what is being done on new qualifications in the field of commerce. It is in the link between the work of the social partners within their national boundaries and the pursuit of the European social dialogue that CEDEFOP can fully perform its tasks.

6.4. All the social partners are involved in Community programmes and they wish to be more closely associated with Community initiatives. A number of projects are designed to test new ways of responding to problems that have existed for years, such as that of certification which is currently occupying the Belgian and French metalworkers. The result is a vast laboratory of varied experiments which do not necessarily result in political decisions on new priorities, such as funding.

6.5 Although all the social partners agree to accept that training-related matters are a wide field for negotiation, a closer look at their requests shows an absence of strategic thinking on their part. This means that any discussion and any expectation expressed as far as CEDEFOP is concerned should query the objectives and strategies of the social partners. CEDEFOP's role thus consists in creating the conditions necessary for the expression and discussion of the social partners' needs in order to clarify their requests and put them consistently into perspective.

7. LINES OF ACTION

The various lines of action discussed below have been evolved with a view to achieving a greater involvement of the social partners in structuring CEDEFOP's work. They form part of a long-term strategy. However, in order to encourage a process of change and its assessment they will be limited to the duration specified in the medium-term Action Guidelines.

Little information is available on the structuring methods used by employers and trade union organisations. How do the social partners intervene in each country: through consultation, concertation, negotiation, co-management or management? How and in what fields is their influence brought to bear? While attempts are being made to systematise the knowledge of training systems, the field of social concertation is unknown territory. It is, therefore, essential to suggest, as part of the work programme, research into key indicators providing a better knowledge of social concertation and its development.

It is also important to construct links between the different protagonists while strengthening CEDEFOP's position and its ability to mobilise information in connection with the vital discussions currently taking place. When it comes to matters being handled by the social partners any product, regardless of its nature, must be based on a closer working relationship with them. More time and travel is needed to go out to see what is being done and learn about the work of the social partners.

7.1. Keeping a record

A number of CEDEFOP's projects have been on the same subject. Based as they were on different and even contradictory working assumptions they were not discussed by the Management Board. But it is through these contradictory approaches that one can build up a stock of information and prepare the choices for the future. To put them into a dynamic context one of the ways would be to present to the social dialogue working party concerned with questions of qualification and certification a synthesis showing the relationships between the methods and the results of the projects and programmes concerned with transparency, mobility and comparability (directory and portfolio).

7.2. Qualification and certification

Bearing in mind the sensitive and complex aspects of this question and of the social partners' competence in the matter it is proposed that a steering committee be set up composed of employers, European and national trade union representatives and scientists. A number of different approaches are proposed:

- How is a qualification built up?
- How does the concept of competence come into being (fashion or the effect of social change?);
- Work organisation and its effects on qualifications (qualifiers, disqualifiers); it would be useful to organise a seminar on the result of the study concerned;
- Failure to exploit workers' qualifications;
- Certification (validating work experience). Prepare study hypotheses for a mission to establish what systems exist in the various countries. State the objectives and working methods of the social partners involved in the field through the Leonardo programme;
- The negotiating process extends to sectors organised at European level and their requests are the result of work they have done in order to make their agreements specific. Over the next few years CEDEFOP could propose that certain sectors use a working method and information on the questions they are dealing with, regardless of whether it concerns transverse qualifications, low qualifications or working and training time.

Here the most important request from the social partners was that the analysis should relate as much to the processes and mechanisms as to the effects.

7.3. Platform and exchanges

Situated as it is away from the bustle of political decision-making, CEDEFOP is well placed to organise exchanges and discussions to clarify matters of topical interest. This debating floor and forum for exchanges takes various forms:

- a forum for senior officials (Club of Thessaloniki);
- a forum for intermediate research bodies;
- a debating floor and training area able to provide scientific and technical support for the social partners involved in the social dialogue by organising seminars on the problems they are addressing. It is a matter of structuring, with the social partners, a think tank located away from the pressure of negotiation and political decision-making, a place of reference similar to that provided by CEDEFOP's Vocational Training journal.

7.4. Study visits

The study visits, which were much praised by all those questioned, provide a privileged means of access to specific and practical information. In order to include them in a varied programme of work and make of them a stage in the disseminating of information it is proposed:

- To organise a workshop on one of the subjects being dealt with in the framework of the social dialogue by preparing it with the trade union and employers' representatives;
- To strengthen the role of the members of the Management Board and especially that of the social partners;
- To include in the annual evaluation of study visits details and methods for following up questions raised during these visits and introduce them into the discussions preceding the preparation of the work programme;
- To link study visits with high-level training courses.

7.5. Research

The tasks allocated to CEDEFOP are located at the interface of research, political decision-making and vocational training practice. Thanks to its accumulated experience CEDEFOP should be aware of the state of research in each EU member country. It is in producing syntheses of this research whilst at the same time involving the social partners in the working hypotheses that CEDEFOP fulfils its function. This work as an interface between practice and research will call for changes in working procedures:

- A report on the state of research in the various countries on the questions dealt with by CEDEFOP within the framework of its working programme;

- A steering committee for the work on qualification and certification;
- A seminar for evaluating studies;
- Meetings at national organisation level to discuss the results of studies;
- A periodic report on the state of vocational training.

7.6. Networks

Given its unique experience in the field CEDEFOP owes it to itself to systematise its ability to organise networks around subjects dealt with in the work programme. To this end it would be necessary for:

- The organisations working with the social partners in each country to create a network tasked with gathering information and participating in the design of European projects. These networks should be adquately funded;
- The documentary network to be redefined.

7.7. Dissemination

Analyse the distribution system, the circuits involved, the extent of active and passive distribution within each (debates, meetings, proposals) of the various countries and submit proposals for the next work programme.

7.8. Strengthen the Management Board

The aim is to enhance the effectiveness of CEDEFOP's activities by assuring the necessary links with the various relevant bodies in the member states, aware that each Board member is the spokesman for a number of organisations within his group and within his country. Generally speaking this complex representation is not structured either within each organisation or at national level. A number of proposals seek to make good this deficit:

- Strengthen the Management Board by providing it with the means to perform its decision-making function on the guidelines and the work programme through seminars for preparing discussions;
- Create a think tank responsible for giving its opinion to the Management Board on key matters and on the evaluation of work;

- Organise a seminar (on the initiative of the Management Board members) in the country currently assuming the presidency of the Council of Ministers on the work of CEDEFOP or on important subjects;
- Arrange specific meetings for separate groups to prepare strategic decisions and evaluate the results;
- Send the heads of organisations a regular circular on certain matters and the state of thinking on the subject. This could be entitled the Director's circular.

Brussels, 31 December 1996

Annex

INTERVIEWS

a. Four levels

- International organisations
- European social partner organisations
- National and regional social partner organisations
- Members of the Management Board and national bodies

b. Four-part questionnaire

- National priorities
- Their link with European policies and programmes
- CEDEFOP's products
- Requests

c. 72 persons interviewed

- Country
- International organisations and institutions

- National level	53
Employers	28
Cross-industry	15
Sectoral	9
Firm	4

2 people were Management Board members

6 people were involved in the European social dialogue

Trade unions 20

Cross-industry 15

Sectoral 15

2 people were members of the Management Board

2 people were involved in the European social dialogue

National bodies 5

2 were university institutions

- ***European level*** 10

Employers 4

Cross-industry 3

Sectoral 1

Trade unions

Cross-industry 6

Sectoral 2

- ***European and international organisations***

Commission

C.E.S.

Expert involved in European social dialogue

O.E.C.D.

I.L.O.

European Training Foundation, Turin

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CEDEFOP and the social partners
Anne-Françoise Theunissen

CEDEFOP panorama

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panorama

CEDEFOP

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After being chairperson and vice-chairperson of the CEDEFOP Management Board and then closely involved in the Social Dialogue, Anne-Françoise Theunissen has given of her experience in producing a study on CEDEFOP and the social partners.

The aim of the study, which strives to provide information and fire debate, is to facilitate a better understanding of the needs and expectations of the social partners vis-a-vis the Centre and to gauge the current position these assume.

Based on discussion launched in 1992 and on the revitalisation process in the Centre and interviews with social partners, the author analyses the role of the Centre, the priorities of the social partners in vocational training, their needs regarding the sectors and means of intervention of CEDEFOP and the relations between the Management Board and the social partner organisations.

This analysis reveals many possible lines of actions which could be a source of inspiration and launch debate on the tasks and aims of the Centre in the coming years.

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Information and discussion document